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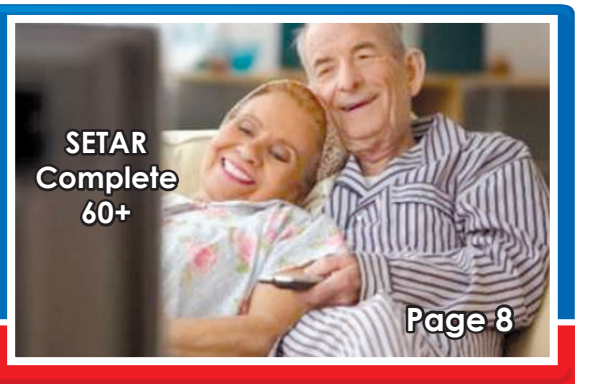


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Democratic governors form alliance on abortion rights

By **BILL BARROW** and **GEOFF MULVIHILL**

Associated Press

Democratic governors in 20 states are launching a network intended to strengthen abortion access in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court decision nixing a woman's constitutional right to end a pregnancy and instead shifting regulatory powers over the procedure to state governments. Organizers, led by California Gov. Gavin Newsom, described the Reproductive Freedom Alliance as a way for governors and their staffs to share best practices and affirm abortion rights for the

approximately 170 million Americans who live in the consortium's footprint — and even ensuring services for the remainder of U.S. residents who live in states with more restrictive laws. "We can all coalesce," New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said in an interview ahead of a Tuesday announcement. She added that the court's Dobbs decision that ended a national right to abortion "horrified" and put pressure on governors to act. "This is leveraging our strengths ... to have more of a national voice."

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New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham speaks during a conference, Jan. 25, 2023, at the State Capitol in Santa Fe, N.M.

Associated Press

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Democratic governors form alliance on abortion rights

Continued from Front

That includes, organizers said, sharing model statutory language and executive orders protecting abortion access, ways to protect abortion providers from prosecution, strategies to maximize federal financing for reproductive health care such as birth control, and support for manufacturers of abortion medication and contraceptives that face potential new restrictions from conservatives.

Lujan Grisham noted the launch comes as a federal court in Texas considers a challenge to the nationwide availability of medication abortion, which now accounts for the majority of abortions in the U.S.

In a statement, Newsom called the effort, which he and his aides spent months organizing, "a moral obligation" and a "firewall" to protect "fundamental rights."

The group includes executives of heavily Democratic states like California, where voters overwhelmingly approve of abortion rights, but also involves every presidential battleground state led by a Democrat, including Govs. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan, Roy Cooper of North Carolina, Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania and Tony Evers of Wis-



California Gov. Gavin Newsom speaks in Sacramento, Calif., Jan. 10, 2023. California Gov. Gavin Newsom speaks in Sacramento, Calif., Jan. 10, 2023.

Associated Press

consin.

The alliance has secured its initial funding from the California Wellness Foundation and the Rosenberg Foundation, not-for-profits that often steer money to public health efforts focused on disadvantaged communities.

While the organization is billed as national and nonpartisan, the makeup underscores that abortion access since Dobbs has settled essentially into two Americas that broadly track the platforms of the nation's two major parties. That means greater ac-

cess in states controlled by Democrats, tighter restrictions or practically outright bans in those controlled by Republicans.

For example, 22 Democratic-run states have weighed in on the Texas challenge to medical abortions that was filed by many of the same litigant states that worked together to overturn the 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling that legalized abortion nationwide. A similar contingent of Republican-led states has filed briefs in the Texas case urging a judge to reverse a decades-old approval by the

Food and Drug Administration of medical abortions.

Still, Newsom aides said the group would welcome Republicans, though they declined to name any GOP executives that Newsom or other Democratic governors might be recruiting to the consortium. Indeed, a handful of Republican governors support abortion rights broadly.

Lujan Grisham mentioned New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, who has sent mixed messages on the issue. Sununu signed a state budget in 2021 that included a ban on abortion after 24 weeks

of pregnancy but also said after the Dobbs decision that abortion would remain legal in his state. He endorsed candidates in the November elections who favored further restrictions but also supports adding exemptions to the current law for victims of rape and incest.

Lujan Grisham acknowledged that the alliance cannot make national policy or even impose policy across state lines. But she said there's practical value in having executives and their staffs have a formal framework to communicate.

She noted that New Mexico lawmakers now are considering how to affirm abortion access with a statute, even though she and others believe the state's constitution already establishes the right.

"The problem is everyone keeps challenging those constitutional interpretations," she said. "We're going to codify equality on abortion rights, reproductive rights and care in as narrow as possible way." New Mexico's process, she said, could become a model for other similarly situated states.

Governors' offices in the alliance also have started working with advocacy groups that back abortion access. □



Marchers voicing objection to House Bill 1125 prohibiting transgender-related healthcare in Mississippi for people under the age of 18 walk from the State Capitol to the governor's mansion following a rally at the Capitol in Jackson, Miss., in support of trans youth Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2022.

Associated Press

By **EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS** and **MICHAEL GOLDBERG**
Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — The Republican-controlled Mississippi Senate gave final

Mississippi Senate passes limit on transgender health care

approval Tuesday to a bill that would ban gender-affirming care in the state for anyone younger than 18. House Bill 1125 will go to Republican Gov. Tate Reeves, who is running for reelection and has indicated he will sign it into law. In 2021, Reeves signed a law to ban transgender athletes from competing in girls' or women's sports. Nationally, conservatives are pushing dozens of proposals in statehouses to restrict transgender athletes, gender-affirming care and drag shows. The Republican

governor of Utah recently signed a ban on gender-affirming care into law, and judges have temporarily blocked similar laws in Arkansas and Alabama. The vote in the Mississippi Senate came less than a week after transgender teenagers, their families and others who support them protested against the bill. Jensen Luke Matar, executive director of the Mississippi-based Transgender Resources Advocacy Network and Services Program, denounced the bill in a statement. "Mississippi

lawmakers are insisting that they know what's best for transgender youth and ignoring the recommendations of every major medical association," Matar said. "Patients, along with their health care providers — not politicians — should decide what medical care is in the best interest of a patient. I know from years of working directly with trans youth in Mississippi that they need support, love, and affirmation — not this brazen political attack that cuts off their access to life-saving care." □

Supreme Court weighs Google's liability in ISIS terror case

By MARK SHERMAN

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In its first case about the federal law that is credited with helping create the modern internet, the Supreme Court seemed unlikely Tuesday to side with a family wanting to hold Google liable for the death of their daughter in a terrorist attack. In two and a half hours of arguments, the justices seemed concerned about upending the internet in their interpretation of a 1996 law, Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, that shields Google, Twitter, Facebook and other companies from lawsuits over content posted on their sites by others.

"We really don't know about these things. These are not like the nine greatest experts on the internet," Justice Elena Kagan said of herself and her colleagues, several of whom smiled at the description.

Congress, not the court, should make needed changes to a law passed early in the internet age, Kagan said.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh, one of six conservatives, agreed with his liberal colleague in a case that seemed to cut across ideological lines.

"Isn't it better," Kavanaugh asked, to keep things the way they are and "put the burden on Congress to change that?"

The case before the court stems from the death of American college student Nohemi Gonzalez in a terrorist attack in Paris in 2015. Members of her family were in the courtroom to listen to arguments about whether they can sue Google-owned YouTube for helping the Islamic State spread its message and attract new recruits, in violation of the Anti-Terrorism Act.

The justices used a variety of examples to probe what YouTube does when it recommends videos to viewers, whether content produced by terrorists or cat lovers. Chief Justice John Roberts suggested what YouTube is doing



Attorney Eric Schnapper, right, gestures to Beatriz Gonzalez, second from right, the mother of 23-year-old Nohemi Gonzalez, a student killed in the Paris terrorist attacks, and stepfather Jose Hernandez, front row center, speak outside the Supreme Court, Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2023, in Washington.

Associated Press

isn't "pitching something in particular to the person who's made the request" but just a "21st century version" of what has been taking place for a long time, putting together a group of things the person may want to look at.

Justice Clarence Thomas asked whether YouTube uses the same algorithm to recommend rice pilaf recipes and terrorist content. Yes, he was told.

Lower courts have broadly interpreted Section 230 to protect the industry, which the companies and their allies say has fueled the meteoric growth of the internet and encouraged the removal of harmful content.

But critics argue that the companies have not done nearly enough and that the law should not block lawsuits over the recommendations, generated by computer algorithms, that point viewers to more material that interests them and keeps them online longer.

Any narrowing of their immunity could have dramatic consequences that could affect every corner of the internet because websites use algorithms to sort and filter a mountain of data.

Kagan noted that "every time anybody looks at anything on the internet, there is an algorithm involved," whether it's a

Google search, YouTube or Twitter. She asked the

Gonzalez family's lawyer, Eric Schnapper, whether

agreeing with him would ultimately make Section 230 meaningless.

Lower courts sided with Google.

A related case, set for arguments Wednesday, involves a terrorist attack at a nightclub in Istanbul in 2017 that killed 39 people and prompted a lawsuit against Twitter, Facebook and Google.

Several justices suggested that Wednesday's arguments might provide an avenue for avoiding the difficult questions in Tuesday's case. Justice Neil Gorsuch, who was "a little under the weather" according to the court and participated in arguments by phone, suggested the justices send the case back to a lower court. □



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EPA takes charge of cleanup in toxic Ohio train derailment

By **JOHN SEEWER** and
MICHAEL RUBINKAM
Associated Press
EAST PALESTINE, Ohio (AP)

— Federal environmental regulators on Tuesday took charge of the cleanup from the East Palestine, Ohio train derailment and chemical burn and ordered Norfolk Southern to foot the bill.

The Environmental Protection Agency told Norfolk Southern to take all available measures to clean up contaminated air and water, and also said the company would be required to reimburse the federal government for a new program to provide cleaning services for impacted residents and businesses.

The EPA warned Norfolk Southern that if failed to comply with its order, the agency would perform the work itself and seek triple damages from the company.

"The Norfolk Southern train derailment has upended the lives of East Palestine families, and EPA's order will ensure the company is held accountable for jeopardizing the health and safety of this community,"



Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Regan speaks during a news conference in East Palestine, Ohio, Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2023.

Associated Press

EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in a statement ahead of a news conference with the governors of Ohio and Pennsylvania.

"Let me be clear: Norfolk Southern will pay for cleaning up the mess they created and for the trauma they've inflicted on this community," he said.

"In no way shape or form will Norfolk Southern get off

the hook for the mess they created," Regan said at the press conference.

He added that he knows the order "cannot undo the nightmare that families in this town have been living with, but it will begin to deliver much needed comfort for the pain that Norfolk Southern has caused."

The agency said it would release more details on the

cleanup service for residents and businesses this week. The EPA said its order marks the end of the "emergency" phase of the derailment and the beginning of long-term remediation phase in the East Palestine area.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine on Tuesday also acknowledged the community's concern that it will be left

to handle the aftermath on its own once the news cameras leave and public attention turns elsewhere, and he assured residents that won't be the case.

EPA issued the order under the so-called Superfund law that gives the agency authority to order those responsible for contamination or hazardous waste to clean it up. EPA can fine the railway up to \$70,000 a day if the work is not completed. EPA can also do the work itself if necessary and bill Norfolk Southern triple its costs.

Appearing at the news conference with Regan, DeWine and other officials, Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro blasted Norfolk Southern over what he called its "failed management of this crisis," saying the company chose not to take part in a unified incident command, and provided inaccurate information and conflicting modeling data.

"The combination of Norfolk Southern's corporate greed, incompetence, and lack of concern for our residents is absolutely unacceptable to me," he said. □

Mormon church fined \$5M for obscuring size of portfolio

By **SAM METZ**
Associated Press
SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its investment arm have been fined \$5 million for using shell companies to obscure the size of the portfolio under church control, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission announced Tuesday.

"We allege that the LDS Church's investment manager, with the Church's knowledge, went to great lengths to avoid disclosing the Church's investments, depriving the Commission and the investing public of accurate market information," Gurbir S. Grewal, the agency's enforcement director, said in a statement. The faith, widely known as the Mormon church, main-

tains billions of dollars of investments in stocks, bonds, real estate and agriculture. Much of its portfolio is controlled by Ensign Peak Advisers, a nonprofit investment manager overseen by ecclesiastical lead-

ers known as its presiding bishopric. The church has agreed to pay \$1 million and Ensign Peak will pay \$4 million in penalties based on the violation. Federal investigators said for 22 years, the firm hadn't filed

required paperwork to disclose the value of some assets in violation of the Securities Exchange Act and agency rules.

Instead, they said, with the church's knowledge, Ensign Peak filed the forms through 13 shell companies they created, even as they maintained decision-making power. They also had "business managers," most employed by the church, sign the required shell company filings.

"The Church was concerned that disclosure of its portfolio, which by 2018 grew to approximately \$32 billion, would lead to negative consequences," the agency said in a statement announcing the charges.

Since a whistleblower alleged in 2019 the church had stockpiled nearly \$100

billion in funds, rather than directing it toward charitable causes, Ensign Peak has been a source of intrigue and mystery for the nearly 17-million member Utah-based faith, which encourages members worldwide to give 10% of their income in a what is known as "tithing." Increasingly, the church and its investment arm have faced scrutiny over the fact that tax law largely exempts religious groups from paying U.S. taxes. Ensign Peak is registered as a supporting organization and integrated auxiliary of the church. In a statement, church officials said over the time period investigated, none of their holdings had gone unreported and all had been disclosed through the separate companies. □



The angel Moroni statue atop the Salt Lake Temple is silhouetted against a cloud-covered sky, at Temple Square in Salt Lake City on Feb. 6, 2013.

Associated Press

Russia suspends only remaining major nuclear treaty with U.S.

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV
Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin declared Tuesday that Moscow was suspending its participation in the New START treaty the last remaining nuclear arms control pact with the United States sharply upping the ante amid tensions with Washington over the fighting in Ukraine.

Speaking in his state-of-the-nation address, Putin also said that Russia should stand ready to resume nuclear weapons tests if the U.S. does so, a move that would end a global ban on nuclear weapons tests in place since Cold War times.

Explaining his decision to suspend Russia's obligations under New START, Putin accused the U.S. and its NATO allies of openly declaring the goal of Russia's defeat in Ukraine.

"They want to inflict a 'strategic defeat' on us and try to get to our nuclear facilities at the same time," he said, declaring his decision to suspend Russia's participation in the treaty. "In this context, I have to declare today that Russia is suspending its participation in the Treaty on Strategic Offensive Arms."

New START's official name



Russian President Vladimir Putin gestures as he gives his annual state of the nation address in Moscow, Russia, Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2023.

is The Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken deplored Putin's move as "deeply unfortunate and irresponsible," noting that "we'll be watching carefully to see what Russia actually does." He said that "we'll, of course, make sure that in any event we are postured appropriately for the security of our own country and

that of our allies," but emphasized that "we remain ready to talk about strategic arms limitations at any time with Russia irrespective of anything else going on in the world or in our relationship."

"I think it matters that we continue to act responsibly in this area," Blinken told reporters on a visit to Greece. "It's also something the rest of the world expects of us." NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg also voiced regret about Putin's move, saying that "with

today's decision on New START, full arms control architecture has been dismantled."

"I strongly encourage Russia to reconsider its decision and respect existing agreements," he told reporters. Putin argued that while the U.S. has pushed for the resumption of inspections of Russian nuclear facilities under the treaty, NATO allies had helped Ukraine mount drone attacks on Russian air bases hosting nuclear-capable strategic bombers.

The Russian military said that it shot down the Soviet-built drones that struck two bomber bases deep inside Russia in December, but acknowledged that several servicemen were killed by debris that also damaged some aircraft.

Putin on Tuesday mocked NATO's statement urging Russia to allow the resumption of the U.S. inspections of Russian nuclear weapons sites as "some kind of theater of the absurd."

"The drones used for it were equipped and modernized with NATO's expert assistance," Putin said. "And now they want to inspect our defense facilities? In the conditions of today's confrontation, it sounds like sheer nonsense."

He said that a week ago he signed an order to deploy new land-based strategic missiles and asked: "Are they also going to poke their noses there?"

"They are also aimed against us. They are aimed against Russia," he said. "Before we return to discussing the treaty, we need to understand what are the aspirations of NATO members Britain and France and how we take it into account their strategic arsenals that are part of the alliance's combined strike potential." □

Prolonged low tides see smaller canals dry up in Venice



A gondola is docked on a dry canal during a low tide in Venice, Italy, Monday, Feb. 20, 2023.

Associated Press

VENICE, Italy (AP) — Some of Venice's smaller canals have practically dried up due a prolonged spell of low tides, frustrating boat crews and bewildering tourists.

The prolonged stretch of ebb tides is linked to a lingering high-pressure weather system over much of Italy, experts say.

Since the canals essentially serve as streets in car-less Venice, the phenomenon of the last days has added to the challenges of everyday life in the lagoon city. Ambulance boats in some cases have had to tie up farther from their destination, forcing medical crews to sometimes hand carry

stretchers over long distances since their vessels can't progress up canals reduced to a trickle of water and muck.

For tourists, it meant gondolas couldn't navigate some secondary waterways that run under Venice's many picturesque bridges. In mid-winter, high atmospheric pressure combined with the lunar cycle produces the ultra-low water levels during ebb tide, noted Jane Da Mosto, an environmental scientist and sustainable development analyst with We Are Here Venice, an environmental advocacy group.

She added that the phenomenon highlights lack of

attention to the overdue need for cleaning Venice's inner canal network.

Navigation continued on the wider, main waterways, including the Grand and Giudecca canals.

Separately, the same high pressure system compounded by scarce Alpine snow melt this year has been a factor for the shriveling of lakes and rivers in northern Italy in recent weeks.

This month, an isthmus linking the shores of Lake Garda to a small island has re-emerged, delighting visitors who were able to, in effect, walk part-way across the middle of the lake. □

Rights group: Mideast governments target LGBTQ people online

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB

Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Security agencies and government officials in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa have been using social media platforms and mobile dating apps to crack down on LGBTQ people, a rights group said Tuesday. The findings of a new report by Human Rights Watch exposed digital methods of clamping down on the LGBTQ community in the region. For years the community has relied on online platforms for safety and privacy to sidestep oppression and discrimination due to social stigma and laws that criminalize their expression.

The report, "'All This Terror Because of a Photo': Digital Targeting and Its Offline Consequences for LGBTQ People in the Middle East and North Africa," documents dozens of cases of security agencies in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Tunisia extorting, harassing, publicly outing, and detaining LGBTQ people based on their activities on Facebook and Instagram, as well as queer dating app



Rasha Younes, senior researcher with the LGBT Rights Program at Human Rights Watch speaks as she holds a guide book during a Human Rights Watch press conference in Beirut, Lebanon, Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2023.

Associated Press

Grindr. The publication also questions major tech companies for not investing sufficiently in Arabic language content moderation and protection. "This type of social media frenzy really had implications on people's lives," Rasha Younes, senior researcher with the LGBT Rights Program at HRW,

said at the press conference. One case the report documents is a 27-year-old gay man from Egypt named Yazid who said he was arrested and beaten in prison until he would sign papers that said he was "practicing debauchery" and publicly outing himself. He said one of the officers

was someone impersonating a gay man who he met on Grindr. Human Rights Watch documented several cases of ill-treatment and sexual assault among other detainees. In some cases, private individuals and gangs were involved in the extortion. In Lebanon, some people

who were extorted online told HRW that they were threatened with being outed to their families and the authorities if they did not pay them a certain amount of money.

Younes added that many of the victims lost their jobs, faced violence and deleted their online accounts, while some opted to leave the country. Many of the victims say they suffered depression, anxiety and distress, while some reportedly attempted suicide.

Mohamad Najem, executive director of the Beirut-based digital rights organization SMEX, accused tech companies of a lack of transparency on their content moderation process. Content moderation is when a company monitors what is published on their platforms to ensure they are not abusive, illegal or in violation of their rules and guidelines.

"The problem with these tech companies is that you start a process with them and they disappear in the middle of it (and) you don't know what happened with them," he said at the news conference. □

Group urges radiation tests for 900 North Korean escapees

By KIM TONG-HYUNG

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Human rights advocates on Tuesday urged South Korea to offer radiation exposure tests to hundreds of North Korean escapees who had lived near the country's nuclear testing ground. Tests conducted by the South Korean government on 40 people in 2017 and 2018 found at least nine of them had abnormalities that could indicate high radiation exposure, but Seoul's Unification Ministry said a conclusive link to North Korea's nuclear activity couldn't be established and other factors were possible, such as age, smoking habits or other types of chemical exposure. The South Korean radiation tests were subsequently dis-

continued.

The Seoul-based Transitional Justice Working Group cited the findings and its own analysis of geographic and census data to say that North Korea's six nuclear detonations could have spread radioactive materials by water within 40 kilometers (24.8 miles) of the Punggye-ri nuclear facility. It said more than a million people live in the area dependent on groundwater and wells since piped water is scarce beyond the capital, Pyongyang and a few other cities.

North Korea has rejected safety concerns surrounding its nuclear tests, saying the testing environment each time was fully controlled and that it detected no radioactive leaks. It allowed foreign journalists to film the detonation of some

tunnels at the site in 2018 but has never allowed international nuclear inspectors to visit the Punggye-ri testing ground.

Seoul's Unification Ministry, which handles affairs with the North, said in a statement that it would consider resuming the tests if the North Korean escapees have health problems or request examinations.

The advocacy group said South Korean records show nearly 900 people from the region around the Punggye-ri site have escaped to South Korea since the North's first nuclear test in 2006. It said resuming radiation testing for them was crucial considering the lack of access to North Korea's nuclear facility.

"North Korean escapees who display symptoms of radiation exposure must

given accurate information and appropriate medical treatment," said Ethan Hee-Seok Shin, a legal expert with the group. He also urged an independent investigation in North Korea based on the test results. The advocacy group also urged South Korea, Japan

and China to investigate the contamination risks of North Korean agricultural and seafood products. It said the area around the nuclear testing site is a food-producing region with abundant rainfall and a network of streams that lead to the sea. □



Command post facilities at one of North Korea's nuclear test sites are demolished in Punggye-ri, North Korea, on May 24, 2018.

Associated Press

Aruba's refinery zone to transform into Energy Valley



(ORANJESTAD)— During a video posted on Prime Minister Evelyn Wever-Croes' Facebook page, the Minister of Energy, Glenbert Croes, shared some information on his travels to The Netherlands. "From Groningen to the entire community of Aruba, our delegation is working towards the reactivation of the entire refinery zone on the island," he commented.

He pointed out that this zone "is going to be the Energy Valley: Aruba Hydrogen Valley", where the main goal is to reactivate the energy industry with renewable, clean energy "in order to take care of the island's environment." Croes shared that the goal is that everyone would also be able to get "a good job, good pay, and that our contractors can undertake better projects and get good contracts, so that our economy can flourish without the need for black smoke from gas emissions." The minister's hope for a better economic and environmental future is the reason for the delegation's travels to Groningen.

The delegation in question consisted of representatives from Aruba's refinery (RdA), WEB ARUBA NV, Elmar NV and Utilities NV.

The delegation was also accompanied by Aruba's Minister Plenipotentiary for The Netherlands, Ady Thijsen, as well as Mr. Patrick Cnubben. Cnubben is the person in charge of guiding the development of the Hydrogen Valley for Aruba.

"I think Aruba is taking charge to show the rest of the world the Hydrogen Valley, the Energy Valley in San Nicolas, where the refinery is located. This valley will be a significant non-tourist economic pillar. This mission is important, because it concerns the revival of an energy industry that has been closed for several years," Croes mentioned. He expressed that he hopes to see the entire refinery zone remodeled into the Energy Valley, where renewable, clean energy will create economic activity and job openings for those who lost theirs when the refinery closed down.

Minister Croes did not expand on the plans for the zone, even though the video showed different images from the presentations given to the delegation about the project. It is expected that upon the minister's return to Aruba, he will expand on this project in further detail. □

Dance group Kids & Youth in Action wins "Best Road Show" in Aruba's 69th carnival grand parade



(ORANJESTAD)— This past Sunday, Aruba carnival organization SMAC released their official list of winners for the grand parade of Aruba's 69th carnival. One of the categories on the list was "Best Road Show", and the winner for this category was local dance group Kids & Youth in Action. The group was accompanied by the Grand Queen of carnival 69 during their performances.

Kids & Youth in Action is a local dance group that has been in existence for 30 years now. For the carnival queen's election, this group was invited to support contestant Adrienne Jacobs, who was crown as Carnival Grand Queen on January 22nd. Because of her title, she was given the responsibility to open all parades.

The dancers from KYA, choreographed and managed by Raisa Montilla during the carnival festivities, accompanied the queen during the grand parades in San Nicolas and Oranjestad this past weekend.

Montilla, who also choreographed Jacob's show during the queen's election, expressed to our reporter that she feels honored that the group won the title for

Best Road Show, adding that it is a great recognition for all the hard work put in by the dancers, the queen and her team.

"Preparations for election day were pretty tough; we trained practically every day for two weeks. After the elections, we were happy about how the show turned out and we were also invited to be a part of Adrienne's team to accompany her during the parades. We of course couldn't resist, we were very willing to join in on the parades," she stated.

She also expressed that the children were very excited to join the parades, and that this was the first time that some of the children will be partaking in these parades. She stated that they danced from beginning to end.

"The kids had a lot of fun. This was the first time many of them joined the grand parade. It was hard though, because the sun was very bright and the route was very long; 5 hours dancing is not easy, but they all did their best. They looked great, but most importantly, they enjoyed it. I want to thank Royal Carnival Group and Adrienne's team for allowing us to join Aruba's carnival queen." □



Aruba Tourism Authority honored loyal visitors at Divi Aruba All Inclusive Resort

EAGLE BEACH - Recently, Aruba Tourism Authority representative Ms. Olga Ruiz had the great pleasure in honoring many loyal Aruba visitors with their distinctive certificates. These certificates are a way to say "Masha Danki" for continuously choosing Aruba as a favorite vacation destination. The titles are as following: 10+ years "Distinguished Visitor", 20+ years "Goodwill Ambassador" and 36+ years "Emerald Ambassador".

For this honoring, the representative had the pleasure of honoring many of the loyal visitors that have chosen Aruba time and time again as their destination to unwind and relax.

The honorees who were honored as Distinguished Ambassadors were:

Richard & Donna Anastos resident of Massachusetts, United States (have been visiting for 11 years)

Kenneth Duval resident of Massachusetts, United States (have been visiting for 11 years)

The honorees who were honored as Goodwill Ambassadors were:

James & Joan Murphy resident of Rhode Island, United States (have been visiting for 21 years!)



Colleen Jenkins Murphy resident of Massachusetts, United States (have been visiting for 21 years)

This symbolic honorary title is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation to the guests who visit Aruba between the 10-20-35 and more consecutive year mark.

According to Honorees these are the top reasons for returning to Aruba:

Richard & Donna Anastos reasons:
The friendly people
Warm weather
Beautiful beach
Great choice of restaurants
Divi Divi All Inclusive

Kenneth Duval & Colleen Jenkins Murphy reasons:

Safe for family vacations
Staff is friendly and accommodating
Most beautiful beaches
Divi Golf course
Feels like our 2nd home!

James & Joan Murphy reasons:
The people are welcoming and friendly
The beach at the Divi Resort is beautiful
The Divi Divi is an amazing hotel
The weather is beautiful all the time
The whole family travels together to Aruba

Ms. Olga Ruiz representing the Aruba Tourism Authority, and members of the Divi Aruba All Inclusive Resort bestowed the certification of the Distinguished, and Goodwill Ambassadors of Aruba. The honorees were presented with the respectively certificates and with memorable gifts.

On behalf of the Government of Aruba, we would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to all the Ambassadors for making Aruba their preferred vacation destination for so many years. We are so thankful to have had such wonderful Ambassadors as our visitors after all these years! Aruba is unquestionably their home away from home! □

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Travellers' Choice 2020

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Another Treasure of Aruba's Beaches: Sea Glass!

NOORD - Years ago people dumped all kinds of refuse straight into the ocean, which of course included lots of glass. Over the next 30 years the pounding waves cleaned the beach, by breaking down everything but glass and pottery. Tons of polished, broken glass pieces were created by the pounding surf. These smoothened, colored glass particles then settled along the sea shore in millions, and that is why you can find these beautiful and colorful pieces on the north shore beaches of Aruba.

Especially on the strip on white sand between the famous Natural Bridge" and the huge red anchor close to "Grapefield" beach you will be able to find your own pieces of sea glass. The sea glass that was created is the product of a very long and interesting process. It can take anywhere from 10 to 30 years to make sea glass. The name for any piece of glass that finds its way to the ocean and tumbles around in the water long enough is "Sea glass."

The colorful pieces of glass

are being used for decoration, handcrafts and jewelry!

The ruby red glass stones are typically from old car tail-lights.

Then, the sapphire rocks are the remnants of broken apothecary bottles. The most common and the easiest to find are the brown (Amstel & Polar beer), green (Heineken & Balashi beer) and clear glass which are the soft much loved "soft drink" bottles.

Funny, how trash can change into treasures!



Everybody knows that you are not allowed to take local shells home, but the people working at the airport have no problem you taking sea glass home. A few of those pieces make

great souvenirs. You can place them in a wine glass or large bottle for decoration and every time you look at it a smile will light up your face thinking back of your unforgettable Aruba vacation! ☐



Aruba Today is delighted to share to its readers a new segment called "Beauty and the Beach", where we take a minute to honor our guests who have decided to spend their vacation on our beautiful and warm island.

In this edition, we'd like to give a shout out to **Julie Poulin and her sister, who flew from Canada** to spend their vacation on the warm, sandy beaches of Aruba. Aruba is always proud to host all families and guests. We at Aruba Today encourage any visitor of the island to send in their pictures and/or messages; who knows? You might get on the cover!







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Article by Etnia Nativa

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Aruba requires solidarity!

Episode CXCIV - 194

Destination values, native heritage, and cultural identity are what we advocate for in our own particular way of safeguarding all reasons to love Aruba. Etnia Nativa, through this cultural blog, "Island-Insight," shares native cultural awareness, educates, and safeguards native heritage.

It is how we encourage you to experiment with an island-keeper state of mind during your stay. Traveling, discovering new places, and taking in breathtaking scenery are all things that many people enjoy. However, tourism has caused significant harm to the environment (both directly and indirectly). As a result, today we want to prioritize the major environmental consequences of tourism in order to learn how to do responsible tourism because our tiny island requires individual actions to protect the fragile ecosystem for future generations.

Throughout this episode, we want to make each reader aware so that solidarity is present in each of their actions. Despite the fact that more and more companies are bidding for sustainable tourism, and at the same time we appreciate more and more the gifts that nature offers us, the hotel industry, not only in Aruba but around the world, is one of the main sources of generating waste. And as outraged Aruba residents, we see that the construction of hotel infrastructure continues, which causes irreversible alterations in the soil in addition to the polluting residues that they generate, changes in the circulation of water in times of intense rain, and, of course, the alteration of the landscape.

If we side with the needs of Aruba and are in solidarity with the island, we will contribute to preserving the beautiful and desert landscapes that this tiny piece of land located in the Caribbean Sea offers.

We know that the whole world is going through wear and tear caused by various factors as a result of climate change and overdevelopment. If we are aware and consider the problems that the Aruba population faces and act ecologically, we will directly or indirectly contribute to caring for this fragile environment that is rich and distinctive.



As inhabitants of the island, for example, we cry out for the preservation of the natural habitats of our native species, many of which are in danger of extinction. The transit of "all-terrain" vehicles as well as people affects and destroys a good part of them. So please, let's respect the visible boundaries and not pass through limited areas, for example.

On Aruba, there are legal prohibitions like those against single-use plastic bags and collecting seashells to take home, but our beautiful natural landscapes have also been unnecessarily altered. Something quite common to find on the north coast are "stacked rocks," a "nonsensical" practice that only contributes to "destroying habitats," or the collec-

tion of pieces of glass in places where for years different marine currents created colorful and unique coastal landscapes. Regarding this, we can only suggest: enjoy Aruba and take care of the planet. Return everything you brought with you and leave everything you discovered in its place.

Intrigued by Aruba's origins and its cultural heritage? Then we encourage you to do something outside of the tourist grid. Become one of the exclusive visitors of Etnia Nativa, a private residential encounter set up where you will be able to touch and be touched by authentic Aruba heritage, a spectacle of native art, archaic as well as archaeological artifacts, lithic tools, colonial furniture, and other items of the island's bygone era. Get inside a recycled environment full of peace, relaxation, knowledge, and information.

Etnia Nativa is, since 1994, the home of Anthony, our acclaimed columnist, artist craftsman, and island Piache, who guides and lectures you through his resplendent collection. Etnia Nativa is the only place that recreates and introduces you to an authentic glimpse into Aruba's native cultural heritage. Something completely different for a change—a contemporary Native Aruba experience!

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11-year-old Fabio Alexander fights for his dream of playing soccer for Real Madrid



(Oranjestad)—Fabio Alexander Montilla is an 11-year-old boy with a love for soccer. He currently plays for the local club RCA and Team Dreyer, with whom he recently to Colombia with to play in the Future Soccer Cup Tournament (FSC). In March, Fabio Alexander had the once in a lifetime opportunity to

play in Madrid, Spain, in the Real Madrid Foundation World Challenge Tournament 2023.

Last year, Alexander was a part of the Real Madrid Foundation Clinic that took place in Aruba. Through this, coupled with his talent, dedication, discipline and love for soccer, Alexander

received an invitation to travel to Madrid and realize the dream that a lot of kids, adults and soccer fanatics have: playing soccer in Madrid for the foundation of one of the biggest soccer club in the world, Real Madrid.

"I'm very happy that I received an invitation. It's going to be a once in a lifetime experience that I will never forget. I'm very excited to play in Madrid and even meet some of the professional players, if I'm lucky," Alexander expressed.

To make this dream a reality, Alexander's parents has to cover the travel costs to Madrid. Bon Dia Aruba talked with Alexander's mother, Claudia Meriño,



who explained more about the costs.

"It's a big sum, but we are working hard to make his dream come true. It's not cheap, we have to play for everything. They are offering a package that includes accommodation, food, transport and a few tours, plus uniform and entry for the tournament for the plus one. However, even with all these things covered, it's still very ex-

pensive and we still have to pay for Alexander and his plus one's flight," Meriño explained.

The tournament will take place from March 31st to April 8th. If anyone is interest in contributing in Alexander's dream, Claudia is available through phone call at 7307325. "Any help or contribution, no matter how big or small, will be greatly appreciated," Meriño finalized. □

Create museum memories

ORANJESTAD — Museums are an integral part of conserving and honoring cultures, and Aruba is no exception. Our Island has a wide selection of various museums for our locals and visitors to see. Take this opportunity to learn about our island and experience a different day beyond the beach. Let us introduce to you the these locations.

Museum of Industry Aruba

Museum of Industry in San Nicolas, better known as the art capital of Aruba. This museum presents the history of gold, aloe, phosphate, oil and tourism through elaborated displays and multimedia installations.

The Museum of Industry is situated in the Water Tower in San Nicolas and narrates Aruba's industrial history which began in the 19th century. The Water Tower was built in 1939 and consists of three sections: the substructure, the high-rising vertical shaft, and the tank at the top. The Water Tower was purchased by the Monuments fund in 2003 so it could be restored and

preserved as one of Aruba's monuments. The Museum of Industry is part of Fundacion Museo Arubano (FMA), which is a foundation set to maintain, preserve, and protect the Aruban culture sector, history, and nature. The museum of Industry is open daily from 9 am till 1 pm.

For more information check out their Facebook page Museum of Industry Aruba.

Archaeological Museum of Aruba

The Archaeological Museum of Aruba is located at Schelpstraat 42 in downtown Oranjestad. The renovated historic Ecury complex in downtown Oranjestad has been transformed from a family home to a modern museum that preserves Aruba's Amerindian cultural heritage. This 21st century museum is especially designed to preserve valuable artifacts dating back to the Pre-Ceramic period of 2500 BC.

In the late 1980's AMA identified its need for an adequate housing for its collection and activities.

After studying various options, a project proposal was drawn up, including the acquisition and restoration of historical buildings in downtown Oranjestad.

These historical buildings were formerly the property of the Ecury family. The "Ecury Complex", is a cluster of single and two-story historic buildings, mainly Dutch colonial architecture from the late 19th and 20th century on a plot of approximately 1.700 m2.

In 1997 the Aruban Government bought the complex for the National Archaeological Museum project. In 2004 a financial agreement was signed with the European Development Fund and in 2006 restoration and construction work began on the monumental buildings and the new to build exhibition space. In December 2007 the key to the complex was delivered and the museum's employees moved to the new location. The final design for the exhibit was completed in November 2007 and the permanent exhibit, fi-



nanced by the Aruban Government and the Union of Cultural Organizations (UNOCA), opened in July 2009.

At the new location the National Archaeological Museum Aruba disposes of approximately 500 m2 for its permanent exhibit. This exhibit conveys through archaeological objects and modern exhibition techniques information on the origin and culture of the first inhabitants of the island. The new permanent

exhibit gives the visitor an insight into the cultures that inhabited the island in Pre-Historical and Early Historical times. The museum also hosts an attractive public program including lectures, educational projects, temporary exhibits and workshops.

The museum is open daily from 9:30 am till 4:30 pm.

For more information check out the Facebook page Museo Arqueologico Nacional Aruba. □



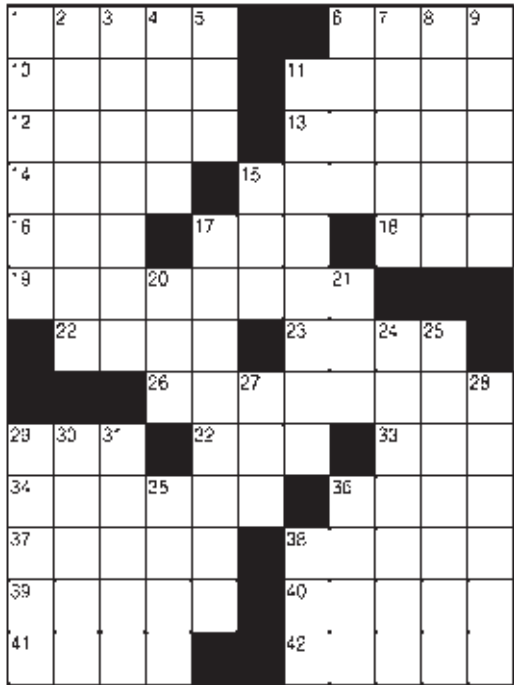
CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 42 Theater worker
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 - 37 Car type
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- DOWN**
- 1 Grain
 - 2 China material
 - 3 New York university
 - 4 Feudal farmer
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 - 6 Brush target
 - 7 Houston player
 - 8 See-through
 - 9 Rashness
 - 11 Succeeds more on talent than effort
 - 15 "My word!"
 - 17 Some nails
 - 20 Dam org.
 - 21 Mule of old song
 - 24 Meaty stew
 - 25 As a group
 - 27 Sty resident
 - 28 One of Santa's team
 - 29 Bits of banter
 - 30 Sung drama
 - 31 Ocean's motions
 - 35 Whip
 - 36 God of war
 - 38 Cal. column



Yesterday's answer



2-22

AXYDLBAAXR
ISLONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-22

CRYPTOQUOTE

RORE XKERN OG UG K IGW

NRZFO OFKH OG XBTVKRH

AFL LGP URUH O CKNORIE

YKH WPNXH

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: WHENEVER YOU DO A THING ... ASK YOURSELF HOW YOU WOULD ACT WERE ALL THE WORLD LOOKING AT YOU.
THOMAS JEFFERSON

More restaurants are trying monthly subscriptions



Matt Baker, chef and owner of Gravitas, poses for a portrait inside the restaurant, Tuesday, Feb. 14, 2023, in Washington. Associated Press

By DEE-ANN DURBIN
AP Business Writer

Consumers are willing to pay monthly subscription fees for streaming services, pet food and even toilet paper. And now some restaurants are betting they'll do the same for their favorite meals. Large chains like Panera and P.F. Chang's as well as neighborhood hangouts are increasingly experimenting with the subscription model as a way to ensure steady revenue and customer visits. Some offer unlimited drinks or free delivery for a monthly fee; others will bring out your favorite appetizer each time you visit. They're following a trend: The average American juggled 6.7 subscriptions in 2022, up from 4.2 in 2019, according to Rocket Money, a personal finance app. "This is just another way for customers to provide a level of support and joy and love for our offerings," said Matt Baker, the chef at Gravitas, a Michelin-starred restaurant in Washington.

For \$130 per month, Gravitas Supper Club subscribers get a three-course takeout meal for two. Baker said Gravitas shifted to takeout during the pandemic but saw demand fizzle once

its dining room reopened. The Supper Club which serves about 60 diners per month keeps that revenue flowing. The upscale Chi-

nese chain P.F. Chang's also saw an opportunity to increase to-go orders with its subscription plan, which launched in September. □

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WK 7 and 14 - all views
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2 Bed Ocean view \$9,000
2 Bed Garden view \$7,000
3 Bed Ocean view \$16,500

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'Night Court' reboot returns favorite but set in modern day

By **MARK KENNEDY**

AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — You can forgive John Larroquette for thinking he'd entered a time machine when he stepped onto the sound stage of the rebooted NBC sitcom "Night Court."

The sets for the arraignment courtroom, chambers and hallways where he had first made people laugh as prosecutor Dan Fielding starting in the 1980s had been carefully remade and even the green couch in the judge's office and the cafeteria chairs were found in storage and redeployed. It was he who had changed.

"Revisiting a character that one played 35 years ago is both an interesting problem as an actor and also a bit disheartening. When I look at my face then and my face now, I'm playing my own grandfather in a way," the 75-year-old actor says. In the reboot, Larroquette's former prosecutor Dan Fielding is convinced to return as a public defender after years out of the courtroom.

He has become a lovable curmudgeon, who says things like: "This is a court. Not a therapist's office, no matter how many mental patients march through here."

Melissa Rauch plays prior Judge Harry Stone's daughter, Abby Stone, the new night court judge and the sunshine to Larroquette's gloom. Of the weirdos who show up in her after-hours court,



This image released by NBC shows, from left, Melissa Rauch, Kapil Talwalkar, John Larroquette, India de Beaufort and Lacretha in a scene from the comedy series "Night Court."

Associated Press

the judge declares: "It's hard not to like them once you know what's going on underneath."

A verdict on the new "Night Court" has already been handed down: NBC ordered a second season early after the revival earned the highest ratings for a comedy series on the network since 2017.

Larroquette suspects some of the interest is due to nostalgia and reruns but also pointed to the popularity of Rauch, a former star of "The Big Bang Theory." "I'm sure there were millions of people who were very interested in seeing what she would do next," he says.

Rauch also produced the show and came up with the revival concept. She

was a huge fan of the original, as a youngster using VHS tapes to capture her favorite episodes to watch and re-watch.

"I think if you would tell the child version of me that I'm getting to do this, my head would have exploded, and I probably would have wanted to fast forward my whole life to get here," she says.

"First and foremost, it's a comedy and we're there to make people laugh. But I always feel that you laugh harder if you're also able to feel something. And I think 'Night Court' did that so brilliantly," she says. "Our writers, led by our wonderful showrunner, Dan Rubin, have really struck that balance in a beautiful way."

Larroquette is the only actor to return to the series that first aired from 1984 to 1992, starring the late Harry Anderson, the late Markie Post, Marsha Warfield, the late Charles Robinson and Richard Moll.

The original show's breakout character was Fielding, both clever and lascivious. Larroquette won four consecutive Emmy Awards playing the part, a record at the time. But he initially resisted a return.

"I was not interested in revisiting him for many reasons, partially because of the love I have of physical comedy and the fact that I'm almost 40 years older than I was then, that I can't jump over tables. I can't quite do the things with my body that I could then

so easily. And just what do you do after that amount of time? Who is he now?" says Larroquette.

"The more I thought about it, the more as an actor it became an interesting sort of problem to figure out — how could I be funny at this age with him now?"

The Fielding in the reboot has matured past his sowing-his-wild-oats stage. His character finally found the love of his life between the end of the last show and its return — but lost her. "The Dan Fielding that existed and at that time was very different from the Dan Fielding we're seeing," says Rauch. "But he's still the same person. He still thinks he's the smartest guy in the room. He's still a narcissist. And but at the same time, he's evolved."

While the new series is clearly a product of today with references to Uber and DJ Khaled there are plenty of callbacks from the original show, like toy, springy snakes in cans that explode and the stuffed armadillo displayed by the previous Judge Stone.

Set designer Glenda Rovello recreated the sets from the original blueprints. "We gave it a coat of paint to update it, but we thought a government building wouldn't have changed that much over the years," Rauch says.

"Walking onto that set just feels so, so special. And I honestly, I pinch myself when I'm walking through those halls. It feels so surreal." □



White House press secretary Jen Psaki speaks during the daily briefing at the White House in Washington, in this Tuesday, June 22, 2021.

Associated Press

Jen Psaki, ex-Biden spokesperson, to debut Sunday MSNBC show

NEW YORK (AP) — Former White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki will debut a weekly MSNBC political program on Sundays at noon next month, the network said on Tuesday.

"Inside with Jen Psaki" will contain one-on-one interviews with newsmakers, and discuss policy issues like the war in Ukraine and

debt ceiling talks, MSNBC said.

The show is scheduled to premiere March 19.

The show will feature a recurring segment, "Weekend Routine," where Psaki will feature a lawmaker or newsmaker and follow them as they go about some everyday activities.

The MSNBC show will stream

the next day on Peacock. Psaki, who appears regularly on other MSNBC programs like "Morning Joe," is developing another streaming show that's set to debut this spring.

Psaki was press secretary during the first 16 months of President Joe Biden's administration, before landing at MSNBC last May. □

Woods, McIlroy break ground on high-tech golf league site

By TIM REYNOLDS

AP Sports Writer

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla.

(AP) — Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy put the silver-plated shovels into a pile of dirt and left sizable divots. With that, their high-tech golf league got a bit closer to launch.

The ceremonial ground-breaking for the arena that will house the league that's being called TGL was held Tuesday at Palm Beach State College, with Woods and McIlroy two of the co-founders of TMRW Sports there for the first step of actual construction.

TMRW pronounced "tomorrow" says TGL play will begin early next year, and the league will be in partnership with the PGA Tour. Woods and McIlroy, so far, have 11 players committed to the league. Besides them, the league will include world No. 1 Jon Rahm, Justin Thomas, Adam Scott, Collin Morikawa, Matt Fitzpatrick, Max Homa, Billy Horschel, Justin Rose and Xander Schauffele.

That list includes six players currently ranked 10th



Golfers Tiger Woods, second from left, and Rory McIlroy, second from right, join others in breaking ground for the future home of a new tech-infused golf league, Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2023, on the campus of Palm Beach State College in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. Others from left, Palm Beach State College President Ava Parker, TMRW Sports founder and CEO Mike McCarley, and PGA TOUR Commissioner Jay Monahan.

or better in the world, plus the game's biggest draw in Woods.

"In terms of fan experience, it's going to be nothing like golf has offered before," McIlroy said.

The concept is this: six teams of three PGA Tour players, squaring off in match play on a data-driven virtual

course that also includes a short-game complex for chipping and putting.

It'll be played on Monday nights, and will take only two hours, with in-arena fans all very close to the action. There will be 15 matches in the regular season, followed by semifinals and a final.

"We're going to have excitement, we're going to have something different, something that is passionate," Woods said. "We've been involved in teams before whether it's Ryder Cup, President's Cup, Irish national teams, for me high school, college, whatever it is. You're going to get

home and away, you're going to get some people that you want to win and not win. We're going to have that type of excitement."

And you can bet on it. Literally, Woods pointed out.

"Wagering is part of our sport, part of our culture," Woods said, then turned and looked at McIlroy.

"We don't know how to play golf without it."

Access is part of the allure of the concept, along with the technology.

Only a handful of fans at typical golf events can get close to the action, and they're often running from hole to hole to stay with a certain group.

TGL players will be mic'd-up, and fans won't have to guess what their thought processes are on certain shots.

"It's going to give the viewer at home and also the people in the arena just more of an in-depth of sort of how we do things and how we sort of think through things in our head," McIlroy said.

"It's just a more in-depth look into that." □

Associated Press

Brittney Griner re-signs with Phoenix Mercury

By DOUG FEINBERG

AP Basketball Writer

Brittney Griner will be back in the WNBA this season, once again playing with the Phoenix Mercury.

Griner, who was a free agent, re-signed with the team Tuesday. The 32-year-old Griner had said she would return to Phoenix in a social media post in December, after she returned home from her 10-month detainment in Russia. Griner had been arrested at an airport just outside of Moscow on drug possession charges a year ago and was brought home in a dramatic high-level prisoner exchange in December. "We missed BG every day that she was gone and, while basketball was not our primary concern, her presence on the floor, in our

locker room, around our organization, and within our community was greatly missed," Mercury GM Jim Pitman said. "We will continue to use the resources of our organization to support her, on and off the floor, and we are thrilled for her that she gets to return to basketball, which she loves so dearly. This is a special signing and today is a special day for all of us."

The 6-foot-9 center last played for the Mercury in 2021 and helped the team reach the WNBA Finals. She averaged 20.5 points and 9.5 rebounds that season. Griner, who was drafted No. 1 in 2013 by the Mercury, was listed Saturday on Phoenix's roster on the WNBA website.

Since returning home from Russia, Griner has been out

of the public spotlight, with the exception of appearances at the Super Bowl, the Phoenix Open and an MLK Day event in Phoenix, where she lives.

"I do not think any of us will forget where we were on Dec. 8 when we heard BG was coming home or on Dec. 15 when she announced she intended not only to play basketball in 2023 but that it would be for the Mercury," Mercury President of Business Operations Vince Kozar said. "And I know none of us will ever forget what it will feel like to welcome her back onto her home floor on May 21. To know BG is to love and appreciate BG, and we can't wait to show her that in person with thousands and thousands of her biggest supporters exactly



Phoenix Mercury's Brittney Griner (42) shoots over Seattle Storm's Mercedes Russell in the first half of the second round of the WNBA basketball playoffs Sunday, Sept. 26, 2021, in Everett, Wash.

Associated Press

three months from today at our Welcome Home Opener." She skipped a USA Basketball training camp earlier this month, but the organization made it clear she could take all the time she needed to decide if she wanted to play for the U.S. again.

The WNBA has said it will address getting Griner special travel accommoda-

tions, such as charter flights, after she signed.

"We are very cognizant of BG's unique situation," WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert told the AP earlier this month. "We've been planning and we've been thinking it through with security experts, BG's side, our side. We'll find the right time to comment on it when she signs with a team." □

On the clock: New timer will affect more than just pitchers

By NOAH TRISTER
AP Baseball Writer
SARASOTA, Fla. (AP) — As one of the game's top prospects, Grayson Rodriguez will probably make his debut for the Baltimore Orioles pretty soon, and then the 23-year-old right-hander can begin adjusting to the big leagues.

In one respect, he has a critical head start: Rodriguez has plenty of experience with the pitch clock that was tested in the minors and will now be used in the majors.

"I was a big fan of it," he said.

"Obviously, it speeds up the game. As a pitcher, it's kind of what you want. Big league hitters take a long time to get to the plate. That drives me crazy, so this pitch clock kind of expediting the process, I like it a lot."

Not everyone is as sanguine about the new timers and whether you're a pitcher, a catcher, a hitter or a baserunner, there's no hiding from this rule change. Of all of baseball's tweaks under Commissioner Rob Manfred, the pitch clock might be the one that affects the most players.

The clocks will be positioned behind the plate and beyond the outfield, where pitchers and hitters can easily see them. They'll count down from 30 seconds between batters. Between pitches, it will be 15 seconds with nobody on and 20 if there's a baserunner. T

he pitcher must start his delivery before the clock expires.

After a pitch, the clock starts again when the pitcher has the ball back, the catcher and batter are in the circle around home plate, and play is otherwise ready to resume.

So efficient communication between the pitcher and catcher is important, because the clock is ticking. The batter has a responsibility, too.

He needs to be in the box and alert to the pitcher with at least eight seconds on the clock. Batters can

call time once per plate appearance, stopping the countdown.

"What was really removed from the game was that dead time pitchers walk-

"There's tons of talent that's spread around the league, and hitters are doing their

gagement. After a pitcher has used his two disengagements, he can still attempt a pickoff, but it better be successful. If the baserunner gets back safely, a balk is assessed and the runner advances.

The restriction on pickoff throws serves two purposes. It limits a tedious aspect of the game fans sure are quick to boo pickoff attempts and it encourages aggressive baserunning in a sport that's increasingly defined by home runs and strikeouts.

In the minor league test run, stolen base attempts went up from 2.23 per game in 2019 to 2.81 last year. The success rate improved from 68% to 78%.

"Any time they implement a new rule or something, you think you know what's going to happen, and then people kind of weaponize it to their advantage," said Philadelphia shortstop Trea Turner, who has 230 career steals with an 85% success rate. "Hopefully it's more stolen bases for everybody just makes it more exciting." MLB has made other changes in recent years to reduce the time fans spend waiting limiting mound visits, for example, or sending the batter to first base immediately on an intentional walk.

Those rules, however, affect a limited number of situations.

Even the automatic runner on second base a drastic invention, to be sure only comes into play in extra innings.

The pitch clock, on the other hand, will be in effect from start to finish every game.

The hope is that players can adjust well enough that obeying the clock becomes second nature. Perhaps some of the more skeptical voices will even start to appreciate it.

"Maybe I'll like it, maybe it won't be as big of a change as I think," Plawecki said. "I don't anticipate it really being a huge issue, but it's something we're all going to have to be obviously cognizant of." □



The new pitch clock is seen at Salt River Field Tuesday, Feb. 14, 2023, in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Associated Press

"You kind of have to shorten your routine up to the plate, while I guess cleaning out the box or talking to the umpire or the catcher," said Atlanta outfielder Michael Harris II, last year's National League Rookie of the Year. "I kind of went through it in Double-A, so I kind of know how that works and how it can speed up the game, but I guess it takes some getting used to."

The goal is indeed to speed up play, specifically by limiting the parts of the game fans find particularly tedious.

According to Major League Baseball, the pitch timer reduced nine-inning games by a whopping 25 minutes last year in the minors, from 3 hours, 3 minutes in 2021 to 2:38. And other stats like runs per game, batting average and the rate of hit batters were essentially unchanged.

"The games were shortened, but not at the expense of game play," said Joe Martinez, a former big league pitcher who is now MLB's vice president for on-field strategy.

ing around the mound, batters fixing their batting gloves, taking extra pitches in the bullpen, walking in from there."

Games early in the season, in the second week, included an average of 1.73 violations.

By week 24, that figure was down to 0.41. When surveyed, about 90% of both pitchers and position players said they adjusted to the pitch timer within about a month. If big leaguers get used to it that quickly, they should be ready around the end of spring training.

Still, there's a difference between compliant minor leaguers and big league veterans who are used to a certain routine and the amount of information available to major leaguers can make pitcher-batter showdowns a mental battle in addition to a physical one.

"In this game, it's all about strategizing and really finding ways to get guys out. I think that's the unique thing about baseball nowadays," Pittsburgh right-hander Vince Velasquez said.

homework just as much as we're doing ours, but I think it takes a little bit more time to kind of strategize and find ways to incorporate those things."

Velasquez doesn't like the pitch clock, and his teammate, catcher Kevin Plawecki, has concerns about the punishments.

"I feel like when you start doing automatic strikes, automatic balls, automatic runners advancing to bases, automatic runs scoring possibly, just based off of a step off, or a pickoff, to me I think that just changes the integrity of the game," Plawecki said.

When a pitcher fails to throw a pitch in time, the penalty is an automatic ball. When a batter isn't ready in time, it's an automatic strike. The clock would be easy to circumvent if the pitcher could simply step off the rubber or throw a pickoff to stall for time.

To eliminate that loophole, pitchers are only allowed two disengagements per plate appearance. Pickoff attempts count toward that limit.

The clock resets on a disen-